

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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R 141517Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5781
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1073

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR TS AG
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO TUNISIA

REF: TUNIS 0996; TUNIS 1061

1. ALGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABDELAZIZ BOUTEFLIKA
COMPLETED HIS VISIT TO TUNISIA ON FEBRUARY 11 AFTER
PAYING CALL ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO DELIVER MESSAGE
FROM PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENNE. DURING COURSE OF THREE-DAY VISIT
BOUTEFLIKA ALSO HAD TWO AND ONE HALF HOUR SESSION WITH
PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTY AND
INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BELKHODJA AND ATTENDED LUNCH
HOSTED BY TELKHODJA. PRESS ACCOUNTS OF THESE MEETINGS
SAID THAT THEY WERE CONCERNED WITH BILATERAL RELATIONS
AND EXCHANGES OF VIEWS ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL
PROBLEMS INCLUDING POLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
BASIN AND NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE. THERE WAS NO FURTHER
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IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC ISSUES DISCUSSED.

2. IN A MESSAGE TO BOURGUIBA SENT AS HE DEPARTED TUNISIA,
BOUTEFLIKA EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR "SINCERE CONCERN"
AND "FRATERNAL WELCOME" HE ENJOYED DURING HIS VISIT
AND OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW FRATERNAL RTO I
NS BETWEEN

ALGERIA AND TUNISIA AND EXCHANGE POINTS OF VIEW ON
ISSUES OF COMMON CONCERN. BOUTEFLIKA SIGNED HIS MESSAGE
"YOUR BROTHER."

3. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT THEY INTERPRET
BOUTEFLIKA'S VISIT (HIS FIRST TO TUNIS SINCE HE CAME
IN JANUARY 1974 TO ASSIST IN SCUTTling TUNISIA-LIBYA
UNITY DECLARATION) AS AN EFFORT TO REBUILD ALGERIA'S
FOREIGN RELATIONS AFTER LOSSES SUFFERED IN WESTERN SAHARA
AFFAIR. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTY TOLD AMBASSADOR
(SEE TUNIS 1061) THAT TUNISIA'S ROLE IN THIS QUESTION
HAD BEEN DISCUSSED WITH BOUTEFLIKA AND THAT THE TWO
SIDES HAD ACKNOWLEDGED ERRORS AND AGREED
TO AVOID CONFLICT IN THE FUTURE. TUNISIAN OFFICIALS
HAVE NOT INDICATED TO US, HOWEVER, ANY AREAS IN TUNISIAN-
ALGERIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS IN WHICH THEY EXPECT PROGRESS
TO COME FROM BOUTEFLIKA'S VISIT. BOUTEFLIKA HIMSELF TOLD
MEDIA THAT HIS VISIT SIGNED A FRESH START IN ALGERIAN
FOREIGN RELATIONS AFTER A YEAR OF WORRY ("SOUCI") OVER
REORGANIZATION OF INTERNAL POLITICAL STRUCTURES. DURING
THIS PERIOD SUCH EXCHANGES HAD BEEN REDUCED, HE ADDED,
CAUSING SOME OBSERVERS TO SAY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO
COUNTRIES WERE "GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF CRISIS." HE
ADMITTED INDIRECTLY THAT THERE HAD BEEN SOME DIFFERENCES
BUT CLAIMED RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES HAD ALWAYS
BEEN BASED ON "COMMON UNDERSTANDING."

4. IF COMMEMORATION OF THE SAKIET SIDI YOUSSEF INCIDENT
IS TO BE TAKEN AS BAROMETER OF ALGERIAN-TUNISIAN RELATIONS,
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CLEARER SKIES ARE AHEAD. BOUTEFLIKA REFERRED TO THE
INCIDENT IN HIS DEPARTURE MESSAGE TO BOURGUIBA AS
"SYMBOLIC OF THE HIGH VALUES OF COHESION AND SOLIDARITY
BETWEEN OUR TWO BROTHER COUNTRIES." ALSO, KHALIL KHOURI,
WALI OF GUELMA (INCORRECTLY IDENTIFIED IN THE TUNIS
PRESS ON FEBRUARY 9 AS COLONEL HECHMI HAJRICHE), FOLLOWED
HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE SAKIET SIDI YOUSSEF COMMEMORATION
WITH A TOUR OF JENDOUBA GOVERNORATE AND HELD TALKS WITH
REGIONAL OFFICIALS DESCRIBED IN TUNISIAN PRESS AS
CONDUCTED IN AN "ATMOSPHERE OF FRIENDSHIP AND COMPLETE
UNDERSTANDING." THEY REPORTEDLY DISCUSSED COMMERCIAL
AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE NEIGHBORING REGIONS.

5. COMMENT: THE CHILLY RELATIONS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND
TUNISIA OVER PAST YEAR APPEAR TO BE WARMING UP BUT PROSPECTS
FOR SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT ARE NOT GREAT. IMPORTANT
BILATERAL PROJECTS (JOINT SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SAKIET SIDI
YOUSSEF, ALGERIAN-ITALIAN GAS PIPELINE, AND A JOINTLY
FINANCED CEMENT PLANT AT THALA) HAVE EITHER BEEN ABANDONED OR

UNDERTAKEN AS UNILATERAL PROJECTS BY GOT. PRIME MINISTER
NOUIRA, WE BELIEVE, ALSO REMAINS MILDLY ANTI-ALGERIAN
AND IS NO DOUBT SKEPOICAL OF BOUTEFLIKA'S MISSION HERE
TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS.
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